

SARAJEVO AND THE WORLD

Pandemic Perspectives

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LOCATING PANDEMIC GRIEF IN SARAJEVO: GEORGIC NOTES AGAINST SELF-ISOLATING REGIMES

Safet HadžiMuhamedović

Uzimam zdravlje, ostavljam bolest.
“I choose health, forsake disease.”
A Bosnian Georgic incantation

I began to write these lines on the sixth of May – St George’s Day in the Julian calendar. Known as *Jurjevo* or *Durđevdan* in Bosnia, it signals a cyclical revival, a world suddenly awake and burgeoning with diverse and entwined life. Set against the preceding hibernal restrictions, the day is a ritual celebration of movement, encounter and interaction, an antithesis of the endured seclusion. Its apotropaic rituals rely on interspecies and interfaith entanglements, as wellbeing is understood to necessitate a sensitivity to the relations between manifold vital actualities. Before I return to the potential implications of this tradition, I would like to make a couple of leaps into less jubilant themes. Chiefly focusing on recent developments in Sarajevo, I argue that the biopolitical regime of power in Bosnia – wholly conceivable through the currently deployed concept of “self-isolation” – is irreconcilable with the Georgic symbiotic perspective.

I am concerned with two occurrences that seem to connect Sarajevo to the world today: the social articulations of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and the increasing audibility of nationalist Holocaust nostalgia. On the one hand, Sarajevans are slowly to emerge out of a period of state-imposed “lockdown” designed to curb the spread of the disease. On the other, they are witness to a sacropolitical ritual – a “holy mass” held as part of the 75th commemoration of the so-called “Bleiburg tragedy” – moved, for the first time, into the Sarajevo Cathedral.

Following the break-up of Yugoslavia, the small south-Austrian town of Bleiburg was publicly adopted in Croatian nationalist perspectives as the central topos symbolising the summary

executions by the Yugoslav Partisans of thousands of people whom they recognised as Nazis. The event in Bleiburg, organised and often sponsored by the state of Croatia since the 1990s, was banned by the Austrian diocese of Gurk-Klagenfurt in 2019 due to the overt promotion of nationalism.

Like so many Sarajevans who have voiced their opposition to the event in the city cathedral, I am not concerned with the “original” occurrence; in fact, the executions were a series of events rather than a single one, and the numbers and the guilt of those executed remain politically contested. I am rather interested in the “post-act”, the sacropolitical ritual of remembrance that aims to rehabilitate the *Ustaša* (Croatian Nazi) ideology and ideologies. Symbolically linked to later events, the ceremony also works to redeem the wider spatio-temporal coordinates of Croatian nationalist violence. Vjeran Pavlaković has written:

The blurring of the past and the present is an integral part of the Bleiburg commemorations; not only do the participants dress in Ustaša uniforms, display Ustaša insignia and iconography, and sell paraphernalia associated with the NDH and its leaders, but there is an active discourse about the Croatian War of Independence accompanied by images of heroes (as well as individuals guilty of war crimes) from the conflict in the 1990s. (2010: 129)

Croatian nationalist violence of WWII and the 1990s was built on the same grammar. Both of its most destructive waves swept through Bosnia in the form of pogroms and forced displacement of Jews, Serbs, Roma, Muslims, as well as political opponents, resistance fighters and other subjectivities deemed incompatible and “degenerate”.¹

On 16 May, as part of his sermon in the Cathedral, Cardinal Puljić proclaimed that the “traditional gathering” in Bleiburg had been moved to Sarajevo “due to the pandemic of the coronavirus that has yet to subside” (see *Radiotelevizija HercegBosne* 2020). At the same time, thousands of people, many with masks on their faces, poured into the streets of the city to protest the event, which they saw as a rehabilitation of Nazism and an injury to the memory of the Holocaust victims (see Figures 1 and 2).

1 The first cleansing was orchestrated by the Nazi polity of the Independent State of Croatia in the 1940s, the second by the post-Yugoslav Croatia in the 1990s.



Figure 1 Anti-fascist protesters in Sarajevo, 16 May 2020. Image courtesy of Amer Tikveša



Figure 2 Belma Alić's performance at the anti-fascist protest in Sarajevo, 16 May 2020. Image courtesy of Maja Baralić-Materne

Whilst the Sarajevo contestations received a lot of publicity, the *Ustaša* ideology remains much more palpable across other parts of Bosnia. In Mostar, where a parallel and much less controversial commemoration for the “Bleiburg victims” was held,

swastikas are habitually spray-painted over the Partisan graveyard. There, as in Čapljina, streets bear the names of notorious *Ustašas*. To understand the scale of the problem, one could take a short walk through Stolac, a town attempting to recover from the complete cleansing of “non-Croats” in the 1990s (see Figure 3). Despite substantial post-war return of refugees, discrimination lingers, systemic and unconcealed. Schoolchildren are still segregated along “ethno-religious” lines and the town memorial to the Partisans and victims of fascism was defaced in the run-up to the Bleiburg commemorations. The perduring apartheid is possible primarily due to the ethno-territorial provisions constitutionalised by the Dayton Peace Agreement.

The two apparently disparate and disconnected occurrences – the coronavirus pandemic and the Bleiburg commemoration – are linked through the renewed vigour they provide for the scalar politics of life. Both are framed to suggest that they refer to the *totality of affected life*. The word “pandemic” is a curious case in point. Its etymology suggests that a given sum of “all people” (*pan* + *demos*) is in danger of an infectious disease or some other undesirable phenomenon (see French, Mykhalovskiy and Lamothe 2018: 59-60). It is a visceral geography – a biopolitical map through which a body politic attains life in the individual body. It asks us to confirm the outlines of the meaningful world as meaningful life. The recognition of life starts from the narrowly defined “Human” and gradually dissipates as it moves down the scale towards viruses and other non-humans. A pathogenic virus becomes detectable as it jumps across the scalar levels, disturbing the categorical separation. The World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 to be a *pandemic* two days before its Director-General announced that Europe is the new epicentre, with more reported cases than China at the height of its epidemic (WHO 2020a, 2020b).

Likewise, the Bleiburg commemoration is said to recognise “all life”. Cardinal Vinko Puljić, who led the mass on 16 May, has written a public statement, “in disbelief” at the protests, noting that “all innocent victims” need to be treated “with equal respect”, “including those from the Croatian nation” (see Croatian News Agency 2020). Here, of course, the nation’s body pleading to *also* be grieved does not include those exterminated or exiled by the nation’s programmes. Croatian national victims are not the Partisans or Roma people, for example.



Figure 3 Ustaša symbol on a house in Stolac, 2012

To both events, we can neatly apply Judith Butler's argument on grievability as an operation of power, namely that the recognition of lives as lost or injured is a premise framing *the life that matters* (2009; see also 2004). Butler noted:

Without grievability, there is no life, or, rather, there is something living that is other than life. Instead, 'there is a life that will never have been lived', sustained by no regard, no testimony, and ungrieved when lost. [...] Forms of racism instituted and active at the level of perception tend to produce iconic versions of populations who are eminently grievable, and others whose loss is no loss, and who remain ungrievable. (2009: 15, 24)

Through the variety of perspectives on the pandemic and the commemoration, we see that the "eminent" subject of grief

offered to Sarajevo is a shifting and changing collage of bodies in both the ontological and political sense. However, these events also suggest that the scalar politics of life – of human defined against its non-human or not-fully-human others – has been re-energised.

From virus to genocide and back again

The notion that viruses and bacteria are invariably human pathogens, and thus in need of precautionary extermination, is scientifically false. Ruan *et al.* note that “a healthy microbiome consists of 30-plus trillion microorganisms per person”, mostly bacteria, viruses and yeast (2020: 696; see also Roossinck 2011, 2015). Even the pathogenic viruses appear to be beneficial occasionally (Russell 2011: 2). Rather than an imminent threat, viruses and bacteria are *immanent* to human life, inseparable from it. Yet, as this pandemic shows, we become aware of viruses only when they pose a threat and “our” form of life needs to be defended. “The problem is ontological”, Butler suggests, “since the question at issue is: *What is a life?*” (2009: 1).

The virus, as a dangerous form of lesser life targeted for eradication, is of course intimately linked with the Nazi construction of the other, the cornerstone of the Bleiburg post-act. Rather than revisiting their ideology and legal formulation of racial hygiene in detail, we can recall the abundance of metaphors employing nonhuman life. Most notoriously perhaps, *The Eternal Jew*, a 1940 Nazi propaganda film, juxtaposes scenes of the Łódź Ghetto and of sewer rats infesting torn bags of grain, as the narrator explains that rats spread disease and “represent the rudiment of an insidious, underground destruction – just like the Jews among human beings” (Livingstone Smith 2011: 139).

Rats were a ubiquitous metaphor, but Jews were also portrayed as other “vermin”, poisonous and diseased animals: as snakes, spiders, lice and insects, as parasites, microbes or a virus that needs to be done away with (see *ibid.*: 15, 150). For example, in *Mein Kampf*, Jews appear as “a noxious bacillus”, “typical parasites” or “disease” “in the national body”, “adulterating” or “poisoning” its blood, etc. (see e.g. Vol. 1, Ch. 10-11).² Ante

2 All references to *Mein Kampf* in this paper are based on the 1999 print of the 1943 translation by Ralph Manheim (1st Mariner ed.) published in Bos-

Starčević, whose works in early nationalist Croatian historiography underpinned the Ustaša ideology, referred to Serbs and Jews as “breeds” (see, e.g. Starčević 1876).



Figure 4 Poster for the 1942 antisemitic exhibition in Sarajevo

Sarajevo was treated to a plethora of such images in 1942, as part of a travelling antisemitic exhibition inaugurated by the State Propaganda Office in Zagreb (see Figure 4).³ The exhibition post-

ton by Houghton Mifflin and available at <http://mondopolitico.com/library/meinkampf/toc.htm> (Accessed on 13 May 2020).

3 The poster reads: “Jews: Exhibition on the Development of Judaism and Its Destructive Work in Croatia before 10 April 1941 / Solution of the Jewish Question in the Independent State of Croatia”. The image featured, along-

er featured a nude, muscular Croatian *Übermensch* fighting off an aggressive, green Jewish serpent. The image, reminiscent of the depictions of St George slaying the dragon, sought to prepare Sarajevans for what was to come: the annihilation of a lesser, dangerous form of life. The Jew-slayer – wielding in his hands total biopower – is, however, the inverse image of the symbiotic, life-sustaining George's Day in the Bosnian syncretic folk cosmology.

Diseases were historically a useful device for articulating and propelling systems of violence. Jews and other designated forms of lesser life were alleged to have spread the plague in the Middle Ages and were often persecuted and massacred, "their members locked in synagogues or rounded up on river islands and burnt to death" (Cohn 2012: 536, see also Savage 2007). Likewise, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, syphilis focused the discourse on the inherently immoral diseased Jews (Sontag 1978: 59, Naimark 2001: 59).

Mein Kampf is particularly immersed into the topic of syphilis (Vol. 1, Ch. 10). It describes the "poisoning of the health of the national body" as a result of the "Jewification of our spiritual life and mammonization of our mating instinct", which "will sooner or later destroy our entire offspring". Its "injurious effects should have been thoroughly hammered into people [...] until the entire nation arrived at the conviction that everything - future or ruin - depended upon the solution of this question". Through the use of biological and organic metaphors, Nazism requested that a total and durable self-isolation be achieved through the likewise total and durable removal of the threatening racialised other, the way vermin and pest are controlled.

Governance through these tropes is effective because it employs existing abjection. The abject is "[w]hat does not respect borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 1982: 4). A rat outside of the sewer eating human food or a virus infecting the body are intolerable because they challenge the separation of the inside and the outside (ibid: 71). Ethnic cleansing, as an example of abjection, seeks to "put things into proper place", outside of the national body.

side many other examples of Western Balkan Nazi propaganda poster, in my 2008 dissertation at the University of Sarajevo. I thank again historian Eli Tauber who then kindly provided me with plentiful visual material from his archives.

A range of other diseases were fused with the Jewish being. The *Völkischer Beobachter*, a Nazi newspaper, reported in 1928 on the trachoma as “the sacred disease of the Jews” (Jewish Telegraphic Agency 1928). The Nazis also instituted a range of public hygiene measures to restrict the movement of Jews as the “typhus carriers”. Typhus, the *Warschauer Zeitung* reported in 1941, was “endemic among members of the Jewish race”. Restricting any contact was necessary “to avoid any possible danger to the health of the non-Jewish population by coming in contact with Jews” (Jewish Telegraphic Agency 1941).

The “sickening of the body”, Hitler wrote, “is only the consequence of a sickening of the moral, social, and racial instincts” (Vol. 1, Ch. 10). As such, the care taken for the body to “heal” is at once the care for the nation/race as a distinct biotic entity. Medical regulation becomes a responsibility of the state and the individual’s subjection to it a duty to the species. Foucault (2003 [1975-6]: 239-264) traced the emergence of these new biopolitical technologies of power to the eighteenth century and the quest to control and regulate biological and organic life, noting that they culminated in Nazism.

Biopolitics deals with the population as a scientific problem, establishing a biological relationship between the survival and proliferation of the self as a species and the elimination of inferior others (ibid: 245-5). In other words, the state’s care for our life *actualises power*. “We must also do away”, Hitler wrote, “with the conception that the treatment of the body is the affair of every individual” (Vol. 1, Ch. 10). The state’s “biological” attention to ensure the endurance of a vanishing nation is a frequent justification for the exertion of total control over life and death. For example, since the 1980s, and particularly during the military regime of the 1990s, Serbian biopolitical nationalism treated with great concern the problem of low Serb natality – referred to as “the white plague” – a problem to be redressed through “natural, heroic” masculinity and the kind of femininity that nurtures it (see Bracewell 1996: 27).

Turning to the question of governance through the biological is crucial to understand the contemporary Sarajevan (and Bosnian) predicament, protracted as it is. For, a pandemic is a constant reinvention of the self in the *demos* and vice versa. Numbers of fatalities are carefully tracked and compared to other self-isolating eth-

nonational bodies. Unwanted populations are removed from the streets, deposited into camps or exiled across the border.

One clear example is the trope of “migrant contamination” in Bosnia and the rest of Europe. It builds onto a flurry of organic non-human metaphors that refugees have been continually woven into. Many of them are quite Biblical, for example about the liquidity of the migrant threat (flow, influx, overflow, flood, stream, inundation, etc.), or their animalistic qualities (swarms, flocks, locust, etc.) – all seeking to deny full life and curtail the grievability of refugee death (see, e.g. Selwyn 2019: 139). The Orbánist Hungary, it seems clear, has long been taking cues from *Mein Kampf* as a textbook. It describes the refugees as:

a ‘poison’ that Hungary ‘won’t swallow’, a ‘slow and steady current of water which washes away the shore’, destroying Europe ‘as fragile, weak and sickly as a flower being eaten away by a hidden worm’, as ‘gangs hunting down our women and daughters’, an ‘invasion of migrant masses [coming] in waves’, as creating ‘a Christian-Muslim world [...] with a continuously shrinking percentage of Christians’ and turning countries into a ‘mere cloud of dust on the highway of nations’ (*The Guardian* 2016; Hungarian Government 2016, 2019, 2020a).

The examples are endless. Hungarian neo-Nazism also works to construct an intimate link between the COVID-19 epidemic and refugees (as “disease-ridden”), which provided the grounds for a recent law that lets Orbán rule by decree due to extraordinary measures (see Hungarian Government 2020b; *The Guardian* 2020a).

The deduction of refugee life to an unimportant speck is a pervasive mark of the Balkan states’ sovereignty. As I write this, I am looking at photographs of refugees who reportedly crossed the Bosnia-Croatia border only to have their heads spray-painted with red crosses by the Croatian police (see *The Guardian* 2020b).

An unusual term in Bosnia, *migrant* has now become a fixed lexical class in the media and the wider public discourse. Replacing the ubiquitous post-1990s *izbjeglice i raseljena lica* (“refugees and displaced persons”), or even the school textbook categories of *immigrant* and *emigrant*, this new word – *migrant* – has constructed people without a sense of direction. This is what they *are*. Although moving, they are essentially static: an aggregate racialised Other.

I should caution that in Bosnia, like elsewhere, there is no single discourse on those refugees who crossed the state borders over the past decade. The diversity of perspectives is not an effect of the notoriously labyrinthine Bosnian governmental (“Dayton”) apparatus, but rather, as in Croatia and Serbia, due to the voices of various non-governmental organisations and the availability of social media.

Yet, the biopolitical regimes urging the national body to “self-isolate” are prolific. Since Bosnia exists as a post-war, apartheid state of (“Dayton”) institutionalised ethnic sub-division, the biopolitical rhetoric follows the same model. Republika Srpska, one of the two constitutionalised entities crafted through ethnic cleansing, has already decided, “with the goal of preventing the spread of the virus”, “to control the persons entering [its] territory” (see *NI* 2020). This health control mimics the biopolitical concerns voiced by nation-states. In this instance, the “Serbs” in Bosnia are cared for through the policing of non-state ethnic borders. These ethnic entities and their borders were crafted in the 1990s through similar attention to pollution.

In Sarajevo, refugees have been rendered the discrete carriers of COVID-19. Ajan Ajnadžić, mayor of a central city municipality, instructed “the citizens [...] not to engage in close contact with persons of unknown origin, and so to avoid the evermore frequent purchase of hygienic items and other artefacts” (Općina Centar 2020). This appeal, directed exclusively at the “rightful” subjects of the state’s medical concern – the citizens – seized upon the refugees’ struggle to survive through the sale of paper tissues on the streets of the city. It is a simple, caring message: “protect your health”. Yet, the underlying script is biopolitical. The subject of concern delineates the boundaries of valuable life, whilst the “foreign”, refugee body on the street is cast as potentially more diseased than that of a cashier at a convenience store.

A range of other measures followed the same formula. As a move against coronavirus, the state rounded-up thousands of migrants and fully restricted them to a remote tent camp under constant surveillance of the police (*The Guardian* 2020c). The Minister of Security, Fahrudin Radončić, promised not to allow further migrant camps in Sarajevo or any other “areas with a predominantly Bosniak population” (*Klix* 2020). The coronavirus may have energised the abjection of refugee bodies in Sarajevo,

but it also exposed the national ordering of subject and object advanced by many of the same figures who opposed the “rehabilitation of fascism” through the mass for Bleiburg.

The scales of biopolitics in Bosnia are also deeply *necropolitical*, in relation to the ongoing refugee-phobic policies, but also to the continued restriction of life for the returnees following the 1990s expulsions. For example, over more than two decades, the returnees to the Field of Gacko have faced recurring attacks, intimidation, and complete isolation from public institutions. Achille Mbembé argued that necropolitics is the ultimate form of sovereignty, which takes onto itself “the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (2003: 11). This includes exposure to death as in the case of refugees.

The political power to create death in the name of “species survival” was fully mastered over bodies in the Independent State of Croatia and the 1990s wartime, post-Yugoslav politics. When, in 1993, Biljana Plavšić, “as a biologist”, spoke of her preference for the “cleansing of Eastern Bosnia of Muslims [as] a perfectly natural phenomenon” (Inić 1996), and when Radovan Karadžić articulated the need to fight the “Islamic penetration of Europe” so that “Islamic fundamentalism doesn’t infect Europe” (Cigar 1995: 100) – words actualised in yet another European genocide – they concerned themselves with the defence of life against contaminated life – the not-fully-life. “When I say cleanse, I don’t want anyone to take me literally and think I mean ethnic cleansing”, Plavšić said, to avoid confusion (Inić 1996). For her, this “natural” act of doing away with dirt was a question of safeguarding the national body.

Dirt that needs cleansing, Mary Douglas (2005 [1966]) famously argued, is “matter out of place”. The appropriation of purity and contamination as a method of governance works only once the scales of meaningful life have been firmly established. Dirt maintains the scalar system as it requires durable and systemic cleansing. As Douglas put it, “[d]irt is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt, there is a system. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements” (ibid.: 44).

However, in terms of the biopolitical modern state, dirt is not simply a by-product; it comes first, although it can be fused into or replaced with other sources of abjection. To perform care for

the individual-*cum*-nation, power firstly needs to prescribe what lies outside the boundaries of life worth its concern. Such extra-mural existence is, implicitly or explicitly, denied *as life*.

Georgic Perspectives: Reimagining Biotic Interactions

The last time I was in Sarajevo, in April 2019, I was attacked. First by a group of drunken individuals who were harassing a Roma child on the central city promenade, throwing change at her, filming her, and shouting requests for songs. And then, after I made an attempt to report it, I was attacked for the second time, by the Sarajevo police. The problem began when I was not allowed to report the incident. “You want to report it? Whom would we call? She probably doesn’t have a mother or, if she does, the mother is a sixteen-year old”. Realising that, in their constellation of meaningful life, the Roma girl did not meet the threshold of personhood, I turned on my camera, which quickly escalated the situation: a policeman pushed me into the car parked nearby, twisted my arm, forced me to provide a password for my phone and deleted some blurry photos and a video.

While I was being questioned at the station, a gun slammed on the table in front of me, the policeman screaming in my face, I retreated into the muscular memory of my teenage self (living in the same city some time ago) and kept quiet. Like a mouse, I thought. I recalled David. The vigorous clampdown on the protests following the murder of David Dragičević made evident, for those who were not already aware of it, the intimacy of the police and the autocratic government in Bosnia. David was a young man from Banja Luka, and he looked somewhat like my friends and me when we were his age. He had dreadlock hair, studied electrical engineering, and listened to reggae and hip hop (see *Deutsche Welle* 2018). His parents’ convincing allegation that he was murdered by the police sparked a two-year-long outpouring of public grief under the slogan “Justice for David”, first in Banja Luka and then, amalgamating with other similar allegations of police violence, in Sarajevo and Tuzla. The clamp-down on protests, which sent David’s parents into exile, continues.

About an hour into my quiet obedience at the station, the situation was de-escalated with some laughter, as if nothing had

happened: “Safet, had you approached us nicely and with respect, not filming us in front of the cathedral and all the surveillance cameras, we could have taken them [the tourists] to some dark alley and taught them a lesson. After all, you are on of us”.

Suddenly, he allowed me to step back into human form. I interpreted “us” as “Muslim”, although it could also have meant “Sarajevan” or “Bosnian” – probably not much more. In any case, it meant some sort of intimacy with him. It was his recognition of my worthiness, a link between my body and his body within something larger.

Grief is politically implicated. As an expression of intimacy with the injured other, it is always a scalar projection of meaningful life. This paper does not call for the curtailment of grief for those executed by the Yugoslav Partisans at the end of WWII. Those lives have been rendered non-lives, and thus ungrievable, by one state regime, and then pre-eminently grievable by another. Neither will it do to locate specific “innocent populations” (usually, women and children). As the biological intonations of the genocide in Srebrenica, or the Sarajevo “anti-Pride” event in 2019 showed, gender and sexuality are easy naturalised tropes for the denial of life.⁴ The coronavirus on the other hand, revealed that grievability sharply decreases with age. So, the question is not whether or not the “Bleiburg victims” or at least some of them should be grieved, but rather how we construct the position for the self through grief or the possibility of its absence. The question is, once equipped with the abject ungrievable body, what are we?

I have argued that biopolitical regimes in Bosnia work through one form or another of “self-isolation” and regularised care against the abject. However, the coronavirus and the Bleiburg commemoration may provide an opportunity for a reconsideration of life, an ontological shift of sorts. Such a transition would recognise the entwined being of the human–non-human world, the always already actual in-betweenness, categorical porousness and symbiotic nature of relation. Its acceptance would not require a surrender to death.

4 More than eight thousand men and boys were rounded up for execution in Srebrenica in 1995. The day before the first Sarajevo LGBTIQ+ walk in 2019, counter protests were organised “in the name of children and the family”, with banners declaring: “The strength of a nation lies in the integrity of the family”, “Support for biological survival”, etc.

St George's Day celebrations manage to articulate health *with* not *against* others. The gatherings host a mixture of ethnoreligious subjectivities: Roma, Christians and Muslims, as well as variously self-defining others, celebrate together.⁵ It is also a time for communication with and through other biotic forms. Children chase each other with stinging nettles or play on swings tied to old oak trees. Young women ritually descend to mills and river rapids to bathe in *omaha*, the efficacious droplets of rushing water. They decorate the front doors with *miloduh* (hyssop) flowers and guard them from the young men who attempt to steal them. They plant nettle in front of their houses or in manure to predict the direction of marriage proposals by the turning of the leaves. Fires are lit on hilltops and hands are joined into a circular *kolo* dance around them. Colourful stews are cooked with the intention to resemble the diversity of life. Eggs are coloured bright red like blood. Children are gently lashed with *drijen* (Cornelian cherry) six times and instructed: "May you be as healthy as the *drijen*". Red ribbons are tied to *drijen* branches. With each ribbon, one makes a wish for the prosperity of someone else and utters: "I choose health, forsake disease" (see Figure 5).

In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler wrote that the "world belongs only to the forceful "whole" man and not to the weak "half" man"" (Vol. 1, Ch. 10). Yet, the whole world escapes the whole man. It is the porous and unshielded life that manages to engage with the world. "Life is a window of vulnerability", Donna Haraway wrote. "It seems a mistake to close it. The perfection of the fully defended, "victorious" self is a chilling fantasy, [...] whether located in the abstract spaces of national discourse, or in the equally abstract spaces of our interior bodies. (1991: 224) Perhaps what this year, of much "self-isolation", can foreground is a proximity healthier than before. What the Georgic symbiotic perspective offers, it seems to me, is a step outside of the perpetual scalar horrors and into a possibility of life *with* and *through* the *otherwise*.

5 This is still the case across Bosnia, for example in the town of Visoko where Muslims and Christians join in on the Roma feast. In other places, like Gacko and Stolac, war and migration have disrupted the ubiquity of the day's interfaith quality (see HadžiMuhamedović 2018).



Figure 5 Melina tying ribbons “for health” onto drijen branches in Carica, Visoko, 2012.

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